



# BUILDING A NEW SPORTS TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE IN NORTHERN CYPRUS

Dr. Mathew Wallace<sup>1</sup> | Dr. Rukiye Kilili<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Girne American University, University Drive, North Cyprus via Mersin 10 Turkey.

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, American University of Cyprus, Head of Tourism and Hospitality Management, North Cyprus, Turkey.

## ABSTRACT

Northern Cyprus is a destination of choice for many tourists with its Mediterranean climate, clear sea, hot summers, mild winters and is one of the healthiest countries in the world. Sports tourism is a frequent reason for global travel in the twenty-first century, which means that strategically planned and structured sports activities can be an important investment towards developing a country's tourism industry. To discover whether Northern Cyprus can capitalise on the emergence of this type of tourism two hundred and forty questionnaires were administered to sport enthusiasts and participants to obtain their views on sport tourism. The results of the questionnaires indicate that a coordinated effort to improve the infrastructure for sports tourism (e.g., transportation and sport facilities) can make it possible for Northern Cyprus to achieve its tourism potential. In this paper it is suggested that the cities of Northern Cyprus formulate dynamic sport tourism project teams to strengthen their tourism industry. It is proposed that linking the relevant interested stakeholders with one another and extensive market research will begin the process of enhancing the tourism experience in each city.

**KEY WORDS:** Northern Cyprus, Mediterranean, sports tourism, infrastructure, global travel.

## INTRODUCTION:

The tourism industry is one of the largest industries in the world that is increasingly intertwined with sport and culture (Redmond, 1990). Popular tourism destinations are proactively expanding and diversifying their sport tourism activities that are associated with excitement, fun and unique experiences (Kilili et. al., 2016).

Activities like orienteering, mountain trekking, paragliding or mountain biking often provide tourists with memorable unique experiences that enable them to reconnect with nature and interact with local cultures and traditions. It is recommended that sport tourism project teams are set up within the communities of Northern Cyprus to manage the growth of this particular segment within the tourism industry (Kilili et. al., 2016). The fundamental objectives of the six teams based in each city (Lefkosa, Kyrenia, Famagusta, Morphou, Lefke and İskele) will be to identify how Northern Cyprus can:

- Raise awareness on sport tourism and its value to the communities of Northern Cyprus.
- Establish the sport tourist capabilities that exist within the different communities of Northern Cyprus including both coastline and mainland opportunities.
- Follow a strategic plan to strengthen sport tourism that includes awareness and protection of the environment.
- Cultivate partnerships between the tourism and sport stakeholders so that they can all benefit from the value of sports tourism.

The sport tourism project teams can consist of six or seven representatives from the following key stakeholders in Northern Cyprus:

### The Government:

Can help with all associated sport tourism activities and in particular marketing and public relations initiatives and undertakings (e.g., advising on the content of a project team website).

### The Ministry of Tourism:

Can provide statistical information on sports tourism media activities, trade shows and international exhibitions (Statistical Yearbook of Tourism, 2009). They can provide incentives that can be utilized by travel agencies, tour operators, hotels and restaurants.

### Tourism Businesses:

Sport tourism generates important business opportunities and it is imperative that the cities of Northern Cyprus nurture and promote the associated activities (Erdogru and Yazici, 2013). For example, when sports events take place in a city, participants and spectators will stay in hotels, eat, drink and visit local tourist attractions (e.g., Kyrenia Castle, St Hilarion Castle or Bellapais Abbey).

### Local and National Media:

Effective promotion of sports activities and events that take place in each city can raise the visibility of them and sports tourism to the country and world (Erdogan et. al., 2010). Media coverage might also include historical and cultural (e.g., local cuisine) information about the region.

### Airport and Port Authorities:

Are able to facilitate tourism by enabling people to travel to Northern Cyprus by ferry, ship and flights from around the world.

### Local, National, and Global Businesses:

The business opportunities that sports activities and events create in each city can be managed by local, national and global businesses.

### Sport Associations:

Sport coaching and officials training can be organised in each city to increase the sport skills of those who practice, teach and regulate sport.

### Public Relations and Marketing Organizations:

Sport services, facilities, events and competitions can be promoted by professional organisations to maximise sport tourism activities in Northern Cyprus (Erdogan et. al., 2010). The organisations are often involved with planning tourism activities, events and linking cultural activities with them.

### Park Associations:

Can provide managed natural environments (Jones and Munday, 2007). These environments can incorporate facilities for participants and spectators of sport in each city.

### Sport Committee:

A sports committee in each city (Lefkosa, Kyrenia, Famagusta, Morphou, Lefke and İskele) can be set up to focus on the social and economic aspects of sports tourism.

### Universities and Colleges:

Can organise sports activities or host sport events which can provide an additional source of income for them (Ottevanger, 2007). They have sports departments that have facilities that are regularly used for sport activities (e.g., swimming pool, squash courts or five a side football pitches).

The teams of each city can also assess the potential of non-competitive events to be included in their strategies to increase sports tourism. For example:

### Sport Training:

Coaches, officials and sport participants train in other countries, cities, stay in hotels and are often involved with associated tourism activities (e.g., purchase of souvenirs) during training sessions.

### Sport Conferences:

Any conferences that take place in Northern Cyprus can be comprised of sport educators, sport governing bodies, local, national and international sport coaches

and referees. The tourism activities associated with these conferences often result in people staying in the area for a longer period of time (Ruskin, 1987). This provides the project teams with opportunities to promote other sport activities to the visitors (e.g., mountain biking, wind surfing, camping or hiking). These other sports activities could be included in the marketing of a sports conference that is taking place in the city (Erdogan et al., 2010). Sport conferences provide a platform for sport organisations to come together to exchange ideas, network and to create new sports possibilities.

#### Sport and Wellbeing Health Centre:

Organised and planned sport activities generate tourism with people coming to a location who will also spend money in a community's shops, restaurants and hotels (Standeven and De Knop, 1999). Modern cities incorporate different forms of sport activity on a daily basis to improve quality of life (e.g., sport massages and physiotherapy).

#### LITERATURE REVIEW:

It was discovered that there was a limited amount of literature on sport tourism in Northern Cyprus so it was decided to also search for literature on this topic in surrounding areas and on tourism in general in Northern Cyprus. Kilili et al., (2016) explored adventure sports tourism in Northern Cyprus in their study and discovered that the respondents want its leisure sector to focus on the provision of special interest forms of tourism. The respondents explained that a stronger sports infrastructure needs to be actualised to enable and encourage those seeking exciting forms of physical activity to visit Northern Cyprus. Alipour et al., (2005) analyse the planning and structure of the tourism sector in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). They note that it has underperformed when comparing it to tourism in the South. They explain that the TRNC and the institutions that govern it have not adequately strategically planned for its growth and do not have a set of clearly defined policies on tourism. Cansel et al., (2008) explain that Northern Cyprus has significant potential in being able to expand specific tourist attractions at the higher end of the tourist market (e.g., country clubs and eco-tourism). Yasarata et al., (2010) conducted research into sustainable tourism and politics in Northern Cyprus. They explain that the sustainability of tourism in the country is hampered by the politicisation of the public sector. Altinay and Bowen (2006) in their research explain that political issues are impeding the tourism activities of Northern Cyprus. Erdogan et al., (2010) detail the political barriers to increasing tourism in Northern Cyprus and suggest key marketing strategies to overcome the problems. Ismet (2016) explored the tourism policies that were constructed after 1974 and concluded that these policies were impeded by the political non-recognition status of Northern Cyprus. Katircioglu et al., (2007) explain that the political isolation of Northern Cyprus is the root cause of the economic and political restrictions that it experiences in relation to the growth of its tourism industry.

Ioannides and Apostolopoulos (1999) analyse the impact that political instability and war has had on tourism in Northern Cyprus and suggest that a single Cypriot tourism product is promoted as a possible solution. Altinay and Hussain (2005) focus on the potentially negative effects on the environment as a result of tourism in Northern Cyprus. They say that tourism experts in the region should set policies to tackle issues of pollution, water supply, littering, waste disposal, environmental destruction, quality of road and vehicle maintenance and health and safety. Safakli (2005) investigates the foreign investment climate of Northern Cyprus and suggests that the economic value of investment into the region can be improved through alliance with Turkey or the European Union to strengthen its economy. Altinay et al., (2002) in their paper suggest a federal solution towards improving the tourism industry in Northern Cyprus. Alipour et al., (2011) suggest that planning for sustainable tourism in Northern Cyprus cannot take place until institutionalised restructuring takes place. They explain that a new concept of governance is needed along with an institutional culture that includes a conservative ethical approach.

Bull and Weed (1999) use the island of Malta as a case study to explore the potentialities of sport tourism to reinvigorate its tourism industry. Kiss (2012) conducted research into golf and sports tourism in the Belek region of Turkey. The paper details the investments that were made to the area (e.g., new golf courses and sports fields) to encourage growth in sports tourism. They explain that the Belek region now attracts, golf, football and other types of sports enthusiasts. Erdogru and Yazici (2013) completed research into football and sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean City of Antalya. They explain that Antalya in the Mediterranean is an ideal location for the growth of tourism with its warm climate and mountainous regions both in the off-season and summer season. Szromek et al., (2012) examined the behaviours and preferences of Polish ski resort visitors. They discovered a need to match the marketing strategies of the Polish ski resorts with specific visitor needs. Yildiz and Cekic (2015) completed a study into sport tourism and note that the province of Mersin hosted the latest Mediterranean games in 2013 which increased investment into the region as part of the preparations that took place in the city. Gezici and Kerimoglu (2010) analysed culture, tourism, and the urban redevelopment process in Istanbul. They detail the tangible and intangible aspects of tourism and the impact that local and national policies have on cultural tourism expansion. Yekta et al., (2014) analyse the relationship between Iranian culture, its infrastructure and sports tourism. Ersoy and Gulmez (2014) completed a study into the development of golf tourism in the Belek township of Turkey. They completed semi-structured interviews

with golf club managers to obtain their views on tourism for golf and perceived barriers to its progress. Their findings suggest that there was a lack of qualified staff, insufficient direct scheduled flights to the region, too few golf courses, a lack of land and other infrastructural entanglements. Weed and Bull (1997) analysed the activities of sport and tourism agencies in England and identify issues of communication between them and highlight a need for an integrated framework.

#### HYPOTHESIS:

H1 The communities of Northern Cyprus perceive their sports facilities negatively.

H2 The communities of Northern Cyprus have inadequate relations with politicians, businesses and the media.

H3 The communities of Northern Cyprus are not doing enough to promote sports tourism.

#### METHODOLOGY:

A quantitative methodology was designed for this study to gather the relatively high numbers of respondent responses needed (Gratton and Jones, 2004). It was agreed that this approach would be cost effective and most appropriately facilitate the standardised answers that were being sought to the designed questions. A questionnaire was constructed to illicit primary data from Kyrenia, Lefkosa, Famagusta, Morphou, Lefke and İskele to establish the potential that Northern Cyprus has for sports tourism. The researchers conducted the study in an ethical manner at all times and a pilot experiment was carried out in each city that included the completion of ten questionnaires by sport participants and enthusiasts who resided in each targeted city (Gratton and Jones, 2004). This enabled the researchers to check questionnaire design and the likely performance of the study. The statistical software package, SPSS was incorporated into the study to effectively manage the retrieved data for both the pilot and full-scale study. The use of SPSS increased the accuracy of the results and reduced the time needed to analyse the data. A total of two hundred and forty questionnaires were completed that was comprised of forty from each of the targeted six cities.

An organised and structured approach to questionnaire design meant that an appropriate mix of open and closed formatted questions were utilised to gather both general and in-depth information (Creswell, 1994). Precise and coherent questions were used that were designed to address the aims and objectives of the study. Words were carefully selected and sentences were structured to maximise the effectiveness of the questionnaire. Spelling and grammar was regularly checked to ensure that what being asked would be understood and any technical language was minimally used in the questionnaire to prevent confusion (Creswell, 1994). Both the pilot and main study questionnaires were completed on a face-to-face basis to strengthen the associated evaluation processes of the collected data. For example, it improved the accuracy of the screening process, helped ensure that the respondent remained focused and enabled the researchers to capture respondent reactions to questions both verbally and non-verbally (Gratton and Jones, 2004). Stipulated study participation requirements were that respondents needed a level of education that would ensure they understood what was being asked of them. It was also important that they either participated in sport fairly regularly or were committed sport enthusiasts. The questionnaire contained twenty-four questions and five were of a demographic nature. Some of the questions included:

**Que.** Why do you think the sports you selected could be developed for sports tourism?

- ☐ Facilities (e.g., access to schools, colleges and universities)
- ☐ Links to the internet
- ☐ Links to professional organisations or sports organisations
- ☐ Local sport infrastructure? (e.g., existing sport organisations and sport clubs)

**Que.** What are your cities strengths for the infrastructure of sport tourism? (please select as many as you would like)

- ☐ Political/ business assistance
- ☐ Hotel prices/ facilities
- ☐ Outdoor/indoor sport facilities and prices
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Local media assistance
- ☐ University/ college sport facilities

#### FINDINGS:

Sixty-five percent of those questioned were between the ages of eighteen and twenty nine and sixty-three percent were male with a majority of the respondents being postgraduates. Seventy-seven percent of those questioned liked their city and seventy-five percent felt that the climate was conducive for sports tourism (Gratton and Jones, 2004). The outdoor and indoor facilities of Northern Cyprus were found to be infrastructural strengths with transport being an area of concern. Fifty-four percent believed that the sports facilities of Northern Cyprus are perceived negatively which supports what was hypothesised for this study. A majority of those questioned held the view that outdoor adventure sports (e.g.,

mountain biking, windsurfing or scuba diving) had the most potential for the growth of sports tourism in Northern Cyprus (Kilili et al., 2016). It was also discovered that swimming, tennis and football could aid the advancement of sports tourism (Erdogru and Yazici, 2013). Most of those questioned said that the beach was a natural resource that could be used to facilitate outdoor sports and that gymnasiums were an adequately provided facility in Northern Cyprus. A majority of those questioned maintained the opinion that community relationships with the media, politicians and local businesses could be improved which corroborates what was hypothesised for this study (Alipour et al., 2005). A greater number of respondents believed that increasing the quality of sports activities was reliant upon intensified business and sponsorship activities. Atmosphere was found to be the most frequent motivational reason for attending large-scale events with most of those questioned never attending one but planning to do so in the future (Ottevanger, 2007). A greater number of those questioned indicated that hosting large-scale events contributes positively towards the national image of the hosting country. A sense of belonging within the community was found to be a key reason for increasing and improving sports tourism along with bolstering the image of each city. Surprisingly, sixty-three percent thought that Northern Cyprus is doing enough to promote sports tourism, which refutes what was hypothesised. The questionnaire findings indicate that a majority of the respondents believe that the sports activities, events and programs that take place in Northern Cyprus need to be strategically planned to maximise sports tourism activity. The respondent responses suggest that the value of sport tourism to each city needs to be strategically communicated to raise its awareness.

### CONCLUSION:

To effectively promote sport tourism in Northern Cyprus an up-to-date understanding of the marketplace is needed (Hinch and Higham, 2001). This will include a need to determine the demand that exists for sports tourism and the potential each city has to satisfy the demands (Urry, 2002). It will involve the gathering of customer feedback in relation to the sporting needs and facility requirements in each city (e.g., sport strengths/weaknesses, tourism strengths/weaknesses and facility strengths/weaknesses). The data retrieved from each city can collectively form a knowledge base from which Northern Cyprus can begin a process that can invigorate its sports tourism infrastructure (Yasarata et al., 2010). The knowledge base can become a source of information when it comes to pricing, research and development, overcoming problems, marketing strategies, making decisions and future aims and objectives.

An effectively planned and structured sport tourism industry can improve the local and regional business environment and encourage investment from interested stakeholders and partners (Katircioglu et al., 2007). Having sport tourism project teams that strategically liaise and proactively work with one another can strengthen any work that is undertaken. For this study, questionnaires were completed by sport enthusiasts and participants from all of the cities to gain insight into the potential that Northern Cyprus has to expand and transform its sport tourism activities (Ersay and Gulmez, 2014). Future research on sports tourism can include the retrieval of views from environmental groups, potential sports tourism stakeholders, sport facility owners and managers in each city of Northern Cyprus (Weed and Bull, 2004). A qualitative approach to research might increase the acquisition of knowledge on sports tourism with rich descriptions being provided by participants in the study on tourist capabilities. Quantitative studies can supplement any qualitative findings with up-to-date statistical information (e.g., range and quality of facilities being provided in each city). Feasibility studies might be conducted on the proposed sport tourism project teams to facilitate a deeper exploration of them. Improving the regional amenities and promoting this alongside Northern Cyprus's low crime rate, beautiful natural environment, its Mediterranean climate, fascinating cultural traditions and history, will make it an attractive destination choice for running sports activities, holding sports conventions and hosting sports events.

### REFERENCES:

- Alipour, H. and Kilic, H. (2005) An institutional appraisal of tourism development and planning: The case of the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus (TRNC). *Tourism Management*, 26 (1), pp. 79-94.
- Alipour, H. Vaziri, K. and Ligay, E. (2011) Governance as catalyst to sustainable tourism development: evidence from North Cyprus. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 4 (5), pp. 32-49.
- Altinay, L. Altinay, M. and Bicak, H. (2002) Political scenarios: The future of the North Cyprus tourism industry, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 17(3), 272-280.
- Altinay, L. and Bowen, D. (2006) Politics and tourism interface: The case of Cyprus. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33(4), pp 939-956.
- Altinay, M. and Hussain, K. (2005) Sustainable tourism development: A case study of North Cyprus, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 17 (3), pp.272-280.
- Bull, C. and Weed, M. (1999) Niche markets and small island tourism: The development of sports tourism in Malta. *Managing Leisure*, 4 (3), pp. 142-155.
- Cansel, A. Bavik, A. and Ekiz, H.E. (2008) The unknown market in mediterranean tourism: Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality* 5 (2) pp. 93-102.
- Creswell, J. (1994) *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. London: Sage.
- Erdogan, E. Hussain, K. and Ivanov, S. (2010) Investigating marketing opportunities of a politically challenged island destination: The case of North Cyprus. In: *Marketing Island Destinations: Concepts and Cases* Oxford: Elsevier.
- Erdogru, B. and Yazici, H. (2013) Advantages of football tourism within the framework of sustainable tourism (model study, a mediterranean city, Antalya) *International Journal of Trade, Economics and Finance*, 4 (6).
- Ersay, A. and Gulmez, M. (2014) A research towards the development of golf tourism in Belek region. *The Journal of International Social Research*, 7 (2).
- Gezici, F. and Kerimoglu, E. (2010) Culture, tourism and regeneration process in Istanbul. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 4 (3), pp. 252-265.
- Gratton, C. and Jones, I. (2004) *Research methods for sport studies*. London: Routledge.
- Hinch, T. and Higham, J. (2001) Sport tourism: A framework for research. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 3 (1), pp. 45-58.
- Ioannides, D. and Apostolopoulos, Y. (1999) Political instability, war and tourism in Cyprus: effects, management and prospects for recovery. *Journal of Travel Research* 38 (1), pp. 51-56.
- Ismet, E. (2016) The effects of political non-recognition on the tourists' visitation decision to North Cyprus. *Journal of Hotel Business and Management*, 5 (2).
- Jones, C. and Munday, M. (2007) Exploring the environmental consequences of tourism: A satellite account approach. *Journal of Travel Research*, 46 (2), pp. 164-172.
- Katircioglu, S. Arasli, H. and Ekiz, E. (2007) trends in tourism in North Cyprus: A historical perspective. *e-Review of Tourism Research*, 5 (2), pp. 37-46.
- Kilili, R. and Wallace, M. (2016) Adventure sports tourism in Northern Cyprus: Extreme, lifestyle and alternative sports. *American International Journal of Social Science*, 5 (5), pp. 26-33.
- Kiss, R. (2012) Golf and sports tourism in the Belek region. *Journal of Tourism Challenges and Trends*, 5 (1).
- Ottevanger, H. (2007) Sport tourism: Factors of influence on sport event visit motivation. *Master of Arts*. In: *European Tourism Management* Bournemouth University (UK). Högsolan Dalarna, Sweden, Fachhochschule Heilbronn, Germany.
- Redmond, G. (1990) Points of increasing contact: Sport and tourism in the modern world. In: Tomlinson, A. (ed), *Sport in Society: Policy, Politics and Culture*. LSA Publication, No. 43, Eastbourne, Leisure Studies Association.
- Ruskin, H. (1987) Selected views on socio-economic aspects of outdoor recreation, outdoor education and sport tourism. In: *Proceedings of the International Seminar and Workshop on Outdoor Education, Recreation and Sport Tourism*. Garmise M (ed.). Emmanuel Gill Publishing: Natanya, Israel.
- Safakli, O. (2005) The extent of foreign direct investments (FDI) in the tourism sector of Northern Cyprus. *Journal of Hospitality Financial Management*, 13 (1), pp. 99-118.
- Standeven, J. and De Knop, P. (1999) *Sport tourism*. Champaign: Human Kinetics.
- Statistical Yearbook of Tourism (2009) *Statistical yearbook of tourism - 2009*. Nicosia: State Printing House.
- Szromek, R. Zemla, M. Hadzik, A. (2012) Multidimensional segmentation of polish ski resorts visitors. *Journal of Tourism Challenges and Trends*, 5 (1), pp. 41-55.
- Urry, J. (2002). *The tourist gaze* (2nd ed.) London: Sage.
- Weed, M. and Bull, C. (1997) Integrating sport and tourism: A review of regional policies in England. *Progress in Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 3, pp.129-148.
- Weed, M. and Bull, C. (2004) *Sports tourism: Participants, policy and providers*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Yasarata, M. Altinay, L. Burns, P. and Okumus, F. (2010) Politics and sustainable tourism development - can they co-exist? *Voices from North Cyprus*. *Tourism Management*, 31 (3), pp. 345-356.
- Yekta, M. Zabihi, E. Jorabloo, M. Anzehaie, H. (2014) The role of culture and substructure components on decreasing sport in Iran. *Advances in Applied Science Research*, 5 (2), pp.13-17.
- Yildzin, Z. and Cekic, S. (2015) Sport tourism and its history and contribution of Olympic Games to touristic promotion. *International Journal of Science Culture and Sport*, Special issue 4, pp. 326-337.